

The

Pocahontas

Times.

Vol No 39

Marlinton, Pocahontas Co., West Virginia, May 5 1910

\$1.00 A Year

INTO THE DEPTHS Hu Maxwell Writes of His Adventures on Elk in 1897.

The fact is proven so far as it can be proved without actual discovery, that a subterranean cavern of vast proportions exists under the headwaters of Elk river near the common corner of Pocahontas, Randolph and Webster counties. I recently spent a week in that region searching for an opening into the cavern, and although not successful, yet I saw enough to convince me that the cave is there and that some one more fortunate than myself will some time discover an opening leading to it. If it is ever explored, it will probably be found to surpass the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky. My attention was called to the subject by George W. Printz, who had observed that over an area of about twenty square miles there are no streams of water which do not disappear in sink-holes, and that all these sink-holes appear to lead in the direction of Elk river, which also sinks.

At point in Pocahontas county on the Elk, thirty miles above Addison, a crevice in the mountain side into which the entire river flows except in time of a freshet. But it is impossible to find a passage into the subterranean channel of the river at that place. I followed down the dry channel of the river six miles, in Randolph county, and saw the river burst out of the mountain. Its course underground was thro' the Greenbrier limestone; and any one acquainted with the effect of running water on limestone will not doubt that vast caverns exist beneath the ground. A stream one-fiftieth as large as Elk river has cut caverns thousands of feet in extent.

A citizen of that county, whose word I have no reason to doubt, told me that two years ago the bottom dropped out of the river, forming an opening large enough to admit a small cabin, and that the whole river plunged into it and disappeared in a cavern, the extent of which could be judged only from the fact that no bottom was visible. This opening was a mile above the one where the river now disappears. A subsequent flood filled it with boulders and the river flowed over it.

Inasmuch as all the sink-holes in the vicinity seemed to lead to the underground passage, there seemed a possibility of reaching the cave by descending one of them. The largest in the vicinity of the river was selected. A turbulent stream, flowing probably a barrel of water a minute, comes down the mountain, and within a quarter of a mile the river pours into a hole and is seen no more. The opening is nearly a circular one, in limestone, and is eighty feet in diameter. After descending fifty feet the bottom is filled with boulders and rubbish, but a passage leads under the mountain, nearly large enough to walk erect. It descends at a grade of nearly twenty degrees. Never but once in the history of the country, as the citizens told me, had so much water come down that mountain stream that the sink-hole could not carry it off. That time it was a waterspout, and the pit into which the water poured, overflowed, and the surplus water reached the river, driving boulders before it that would weigh tons.

I went into the pit a few rods and saw the way was open; but having no lantern, I did not venture far. That afternoon I procured a lantern from a farmer, and he and his son went with me; but the boy would not go into the cave under any consideration, and the old man said he had once gone in 300 yards and found the passage closed up by a rock which had fallen from above. I was able to crawl under the rock, and found the passage open beyond. But the farmers courage failed and he would go no further. It is unsafe to go in a strange cavern alone, so I returned also, and waited for the arrival of my brother, C. J. Maxwell, and my ne-

hew, C. W. Maxwell, who had arranged to meet me there, but had not yet come.

The person who explores caves must face several imaginary dangers, but only a few real ones. The people of that vicinity are as much afraid of caves as if they were the gates of hades; yet they cannot tell you what they are afraid of. The chief dangers are three, they are real, and should be carefully guarded against. They are, rock falling from above; chasms and precipices beneath into which one may fall, and the danger of becoming wedged in narrow passages and drowning. There is no danger of firedamp in any of caves in that region, for a current of air blows out of all of them.

The next afternoon my brother and nephew came, and the following morning we went down into the sink-hole. We provided lanterns, extra oil in a bottle, in case we should exhaust what was in the lanterns; ropes for descending precipices, a measuring line to take the distance, and chalk to mark the passage to guide us upon our return. We found that the rock which had closed the farmer's advance was only 200 feet down, instead of 300 yards as he had said. Large quantities of drift timber, logs thirty of forty feet long, were found in the cavern having been carried in by floods. They were sometimes wedged in the galleries twenty feet above the floor. Sometimes we descended nearly perpendicularly; again the passage was horizontal, but the general descent was about twenty feet in 100. For the most part we could walk erect, and we did not have to wade much water until we had gone down 1,000 feet. There the passage grew narrow and crooked; and sometimes we had trouble in keeping our lanterns above water as we crawled through the low galleries. Except for the water the cavern was not particularly dangerous, or disagreeable. We constantly expected to see the passage open into the vast caverns through which we believed Elk river flowed beneath the mountain, and for that reason we pushed on farther than we would have been justified in doing for mere curiosity to explore the small cavern we were in.

We found several rooms with ceilings forty or more feet high, and there were occasional stalactites; but nothing of much importance was seen. We were not able to penetrate beyond 1,800 feet, and probably 400 feet below the point of entrance. In time of drought one might go further; but we found the passages so small and the water so deep that we could not keep our large stable lanterns above water, although we still had plenty of breathing space. Beyond us we could hear the water flowing into a chasm, but we could not reach its brink in order to see what lay below. We returned, having been in the cave three hours, and being satisfied that we had almost found the object for which we were searching.

However, we were not to be baffled by one failure. That afternoon we separated, each taking a different direction, and we explored the whole region, and talked with the people about caves, of which there are dozens, and on the third day we met by appointment at Mingo, within three miles of the head spring of the Tygart river, and about five miles east of the cave which we had examined. The most promising opening into the supposed Elk river cavern was against the side of Mingo Knob, about four miles from Elk river. That cave was represented to us as going down almost perpendicular to an unknown depth. No man had been in it for forty years. The ghostly stories which the people told us about it was enough to make us superstitious. They said that two men went in it forty years ago. When they came out one had become insane and the other never would tell what he saw. They also said that Indians used the cavern as a dungeon, into which they threw their captives

and left them to die. Nevertheless we decided to try it, not taking much stock in the traditions.

This cavern was quite different from the one we had explored a few days before. This had no water in it, and instead of descending by an easy grade, it went sheer down like a vast well, into midnight blackness of the unknown depths below. However, the statement that the descent was perpendicular must be somewhat qualified.

It was perpendicular in places and very steep in others, with chasms "mocking the sight with unspeakable depths." But taken as a whole, it is not very large, if its dimensions are expressed in feet. There are probably a hundred caves in West Virginia into which a person can penetrate farther; but I know of none in which more danger exists and where there is more of the horrible to be seen and felt. I once descended 600 feet into the crater of an extinct volcano, and considered that risky, but it was not equal to this cavern in real or apparent danger, or in difficulty.

With our ropes, lanterns, an ax and chalk, we started. The opening against the side of a hill was about four feet square. Twenty feet down there was a shelf, and we cut a pole and resting the lower end on the shelf, one went down, while the others cut another pole of equal length and let it down with ropes, and its lower end was rested on another shelf twenty feet lower. We then climbed down these poles and reached a place where we had good footing. The danger here consisted of loosened rocks falling upon those who first went down.

The next 120 feet was not perpendicular, and we climbed down, holding to the angular rocks. The descent was comparatively easy and safe. There we emerged into a room which would have been grand, had it not been so grim and black. By measurement it was 192 feet long, 132 wide, with the central ceiling of solid sandstone about 30 feet high. The floor was covered for the most part with sandstone blocks which had fallen from above. Part of the floor was of limestone, about the only limestone we saw.

HU. MAXWELL.

After looking about this room until we were satisfied, we began searching for a way to descend into the next depth. Broken rocks nearly closed the passage, but we proceeded down a very steep slope about seventy feet, when my brother, who was in the lead, remarked that his lantern threw no light ahead, that everything looked black. Suspecting that he was about to step into water, I told him to throw a rock ahead. He did so but instead of splashing in water, nothing was heard for several seconds, when the fall resounded far below. Instead of a pond of water, he was standing on the very brink of a pit so deep that the lantern could not throw light to the bottom, and did not reflect from the sides. The rocks on which we were standing were loose and inclined to slide over the brink. We lost no time in retracing our way to the large room.

Along the floor of the room on the extreme western side is a fissure in the limestone, from one to four feet wide and forty or fifty long. We prepared our ropes for descending into this, believing that it would lead us below. But when we had tied a rope to a lantern and had let it down, and could see no bottom, we abandoned our project of getting down in that quarter. Fortunately, we found a broken place in the precipice which had first turned us back, and we made our way down a hundred feet or more, and found ourselves in another room, much larger than the one above. The roof was more than 100 feet high as we judged. The room would seat 10,000 people. So perfect were the acoustic properties of this ghostly cavern that we could converse in a whisper 100 feet apart. Our lanterns were not

strong enough to light the whole room, and only by setting paper on fire could we see it all at once. We had our first sight of the precipice that stopped us. It formed one wall of this room. Its crest was not less than ninety feet above us. The room was of irregular form with its galleries and always leading off. It contained no element of beauty; everything was gloomy and dim.

Down to this point the descent can be made without much danger by a good climber who knows the way and with nerve steady. But in going down deeper, the danger rapidly increases, because the passages are small and there is likelihood of becoming wedged fast between rocks. We were now 500 feet below the entrance, and had not yet found the looked for passage leading under the mountain to the Elk river cavern. We still hoped to find it, and after a long search we found openings leading further down, but they small. We reached an extreme depth, almost a perpendicular depth, of 600 feet. The last ninety feet was sheer down through an opening no larger than a well, and in places not eighteen inches across. It was like going down a chimney. It became so small we could go no further; and we had not found what we were looking for. We had consumed three hours in hard labor in descending that 600 feet and it took us an hour to climb to the surface of the ground. Those who enjoy underground scenery will be repaid by going down to the floor of this second large room which is 500 feet from the entrance; but my advice is that no one go further. There is nothing to see. But, those who want to tempt fate may do so, and they will find the opening by going to the extreme north end of the gallery leading into the lower large room, and there enter a cleft in the floor which is not hard to find. The rest of the way is straight down; and if one of those loose boulders slip half a foot it will close the passage forever. It is well for those who go down to bear this in mind, as it adds materially to one's peculiar sensations as he squeezes his body through the narrow throats of the plutonic chimney.

Howard C. Gabbert, who has been the efficient and accommodating clerk in W. H. Barlow's store the past sixteen months, left Friday evening for Cleveland, Ohio, where he has accepted a position in an electrical machine shop. His many friends are sorry to lose him but all unite in good wishes for his success in the "Buckeye State."

Huntersville

A. B. McComb is having his dwelling house repainted.

Mr. Guin, who had his finger torn off in the Sheet-shingle mill, is doing nicely.

Deputy Game Warden Lockridge came home from Belington Saturday.

Aaron Thomas has purchased a farm near Edney and will move to it soon.

Geo. W. Wagner, of Marlinton was in our town Friday looking after business interests.

Winfred Moore and Raymond Lockridge were visiting in Highland county from Saturday till Monday.

Misses Lollie McComb and Icie Cruikshank, of Marlinton, were calling on Miss McComb's parents here Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Barlow were guests of Mr. and Mrs. Geo. W. Wagner at Marlinton Sunday.

Jamie McComb and his sister, Miss Birdie, were in our town a few hours Sunday evening.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry McComb, Mrs. Mamie Jordan and sister Kathleen, and Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Thomas, were some of the town people who visited the county seat Saturday.

Rev. Mr. George and W. H. Gross were at Marlinton Friday.

E. D. Coontz and wife who have been Huntersville residents since last September, moved to their old homestead near Belington, last Thursday.

Work on the repairs of Mr. Lockridge's brick residence building has been greatly delayed on account of plastering material. Mr. and Mrs. G. C. Poling will occupy it when completed.

The fish in the streams for seventeen miles around this place heaved a great sigh of relief when the carriage which bore their arch enemy, E. D. Koontz, the indomitable "Nimrod," was seen to go round the bend, carrying him far away from their haunts. Hundreds of their companions had already met death at his hooks and spears.

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CHINESE PRINTING.

The Compositors Are Staid and Dignified and Never Rush.

A font of type in the Chinese language requires 11,000 spaces, and in the large and spacious rack each word, instead of each letter, as in English, has a place by itself. There is also a peculiar grouping or classification of symbols into groups to further facilitate the mental labors of the typesetters. Thus in the immediate vicinity of the symbol for fish would be found the symbols of scales, net, fins, tail, gills. This simplifies the labor, which in any event must be strenuous; it is evident that the compositor's end of the Chinese newspaper should, if perfect justice ruled, be the highest paid.

The compositor is a staid and dignified individual, and as he slowly walks from symbol to symbol, picking up those which he requires with provoking calmness, the American compositor might well wonder when the work would be completed, and to get up the type required for a small four page daily paper the constant labors of eight or nine skilled Chinamen are required for twelve or thirteen hours, the entire work in every department being the antithesis of the rush and whirl and marvelous celerity of the modern American publication.

Astounding Memories.

Hornee Verne is the best example of visual memory. He could paint a portrait of a man, life size, after having once looked at his model. Mozart had a great musical memory. Having heard twice the "Miserere" in the Sistine chapel, he wrote down the full score of it. There are soloists who during twenty-four hours can play the composition of other masters without ever skipping a note.

Thoroughly Broken.

"Subster is a perfect husband."

"I never heard he was so wonderful."

"Well, every time he sees a mail box he feels in his pockets."—Buffalo Express.

S. B. MOORE, Assessor.

Adds Healthful Qualities to the Food Economizes Flour, Butter and Eggs

ROYAL
BAKING POWDER
The only baking powder made from Royal Grape Cream of Tartar
No Alum—No Lime Phosphates

4,085 Applicants Took the Examinations.

A WOMAN'S TACT.

The Actress Spoiled a Scene, but Soothed the Angry Star.

There is a pretty story of Modjeska and a new leading woman who was to play the part of Elizabeth in Schiller's dreary play, "Mary Stuart."

The new leading woman, who was to assume the part of the red haired sovereign, was a beautiful young person whose acting experience had been limited to a few seasons in modern society plays.

On the night of the first performance, in the most important scene of the drama, where the captive Mary confronts Elizabeth in Fotheringay park, all was not well. The new leading woman, wearing a wig for the first time in her career and looking uncomfortable in the high Elizabethan ruff, was ill at ease in the beginning, and, losing one of the chief words and thereby the meter from her opening lines, she began to flounder and soon "dried up" completely.

This left Schiller's unhappy Mary standing in the center of the stage waiting to be adequately insulted. But Elizabeth's mind was a blank, madam could see that, and jumping to her last speech, the curtain was brought down. Everybody on the stage was distressed. But instantly the beautiful young woman, disguised as the frato Elizabeth, rushed to the star's side and said:

"Dear madam, I am so sorry, but you know you do look so lovely in this part it was impossible for me to say those terrible things to you!"

For a second there was a mixed expression on Modjeska's face, and then she forgivingly patted the speaker's cheek and walked away.—Metropolitan Magazine.

THE STAGE DRINK.

Some Sarcastic Comments Upon Its Terrific Potency.

What we have always noticed about the stage drink is its terrific potency. That there are other points of interest in this thing we do not deny, and we are inclined to agree with a writer in one of the weekly papers who says that "our actors, even the best and most experienced of them, haven't the faintest notion of how to drink naturally and with the air of men who are enjoying the process." And we have frequently noted that curious unspillable quality in the musical comedy drink. In this particular type of potion, which is set to music and which we may call the gay drink, the careless gestures of the flagon holders, who do not actually drink until they have waved the goblet upside down, have been known to make strong and thirsty galleries burst into tears, commencing with reproaches. When falsely accused Frederick suffers a momentary attack of depression and decides to set out for territories exclusively canine he pours into a small liquor glass a little very pale brandy and, with a desperate cry of frenzy and despair, drinks it at one go. Sometimes it is half a glass of noncorporal elixir. But the result is the same. Falsely accused Frederick instantly starts his Apache dance with the grand piano forte, and friends who believed in him, entering at that moment, say, "Good heavens, he's drunk!"

The drink is potent. It cannot always be a case of weakness of head.—London Globe.

No Beggars in Copenhagen.

Copenhagen is a city of 500,000 inhabitants. During a week's stay I have seen no seller of matches or boot laces, no gutter merchant, no blind or other afflicted persons about the streets asking for alms—not one single sign of distress due to poverty.

I have explored the artisans' quarters by day and late at night. There is not a single spot in the whole of Copenhagen that could be compared even remotely to the slums in our large towns. There are no unemployed hanging about the street corners, no unkempt women standing idly at the doors, no ragged and dirty children playing in the gutter. There are no dirty houses, with dirty or broken windows, mended with bits of paper, and a ragged apron or a torn bedsheet doing duty for a curtain.—Denmark Letter in London Express.

WANTED:—Man with team to take half interest in good pulp wood job. Apply to F. A. Rogers, Ichwood, W. Va.